

A Study on the Chinese-English Translation of Domestic Movie Titles from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract: In the context of film globalization, movie titles, as important cultural symbols, have a significant impact on the promotion of movies. However, there are currently limited researches exploring the Chinese English translation of domestic movie titles from the perspective of Skopos theory. Therefore, this study analyzes the Chinese-English translation strategies and effects of domestic movie titles, as well as the purpose, objectives, and translation methods in the translation process, through the three rules of Skopos theory. The aim of this study is to provide a theoretical basis and practical reference for the translation of domestic movie titles from Chinese to English, improve the international spreading effect of movies, promote the development of Chinese-English translation research, and have important significance for promoting the development of domestic movies in the international perspective.

Keywords: Skopos Theory; Movie Titles; Chinese English Translation Strategies

1. Introduction

As an important cross-cultural communication medium, the title of a movie is not only the identification and naming of the movie, but also an important means of promotion and publicity. The translation of movie titles plays a crucial role in promoting communication and understanding between different cultures and is increasingly valued. However, translating movie titles involves multiple levels such as language, culture, and art, and translators often face various challenges and difficulties in the process of translating domestic movie titles from Chinese to English. At present, research on the Chinese English translation of domestic movie titles is still relatively limited, especially lacking research based on the perspective of Skopos theory. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out this research. This study will take Skopos theory as the theoretical framework, analyze a series of movie titles, explore the strategies chosen by translators in different contexts, and how these strategies affect the understanding and acceptance of target language audiences, thereby revealing the problems in movie titles translation. Through research and analysis, this study suggests that translators can use methods such as literal translation, free translation, transliteration, and modified translation to translate movie titles, in order to provide theoretical guidance and practical reference for the Chinese-English translation of domestic movie titles, provide more systematic and feasible guiding principles, and so as to promote cross-cultural communication.

2. Overview of Skopos Theory

In recent years, the widespread application of Skopos theory in the field of translation research has attracted great attention from scholars. Skopos theory is a translation theory proposed by German translator Hans Vermeer in the 1970s. The core viewpoint of this theory is that the purpose of translation determines the choice of translator, and it is believed that the purpose of translation directly affects the decision-making and selection of translation methods and strategies in the translation process^[1]. According to the Skopos theory of translation, the purpose of translation is to meet specific communication goals and complete specific communicative tasks^[2]. Therefore, the quality of translation should be evaluated based on whether the predetermined communication objectives have been achieved. In the translation of movie titles, this viewpoint has been applied, making researchers pay more attention to the impact of translation purposes on translation strategies and methods.

Skopos theory includes three major rules: Skopos rule, Coherence rule, and Fidelity rule^[3]. (1) Skopos principle: The main focus of translation is to serve as a specific function or purpose in the target culture, which means that the translator needs to consider the target audience, the expected function of the translation, and the expectations of the client. (2) The principle of coherence: Translation should maintain internal coherence and consistency within its own context, rather than attempting to completely replicate the form, structure, and content of

the source text. This means that translators are free to adapt and modify the text as long as it achieves the expected purpose and maintains the coherence of the target language and culture. (3) The principle of fidelity: The translator should be faithful to the intention and spirit of the original text, but not necessarily copying word for word. The purpose is to achieve equal results in the target culture while considering language and cultural customs.

Overall, Skopos theory emphasizes the importance of considering the functional and communicative aspects of translation, rather than strictly adhering to literal or literal translation methods.

3. Overview of the role, influencing factors, and translation methods of movie title translation

3.1 The role of translating movie titles

The essence of translation is to spread ideas on condition that translations of movie titles are correct^[4]. In this sense, the movie title translation is the destination of all kinds of translation. Movie title translation is the process of translating the original title of a movie from the source language to the target language^[5]. As an identifier of a movie, the movie title plays an important role in promoting the film, attracting box office from audiences promoting the market, summarizing the content of the movie, and shaping the brand image. The movie title mainly has three functions: informational function, aesthetic function, and commercial function^[6]. The informational function serves as the most basic function of a movie title, which can convey partial information about the movie content to the audiences, allowing the audiences to have a preliminary understanding of the theme, content, and style of the movie, and thus determine whether they are interested in the movie. Aesthetic function refers to the fact that attractive movie titles can greatly influence the audiences' first impression of the movie, stimulate their curiosity and interest, and thereby increase the movie's popularity and viewing rate. In addition, due to the nature of films, their titles also have commercial functions, which can yield economic effects.

3.2 The influencing factors of movie title translation

There are many factors that affect the translation of movie titles, including cultural factors, historical allusions, aesthetic factors, and commercial factors. Cultural factor is an important influencing factor, and different languages and cultural differences determine the way titles are expressed in different target languages. Therefore, when translating movie titles, it is necessary to consider the acceptance and taste preferences of the target language audiences towards the film culture. Historical allusion is another influencing factor, and some movie titles may involve historical allusions or specific cultural backgrounds. When translating, translators need to possess relevant cultural knowledge and convey it through reasonable translation strategies. Aesthetic factors are also of great importance, and the translation of movie titles needs to conform to the aesthetic habits of the target language audiences, including appropriate symbolism. Therefore, accurately conveying the artistic quality of the movie to the audiences through translation is also crucial. In addition, commercial factors can also affect the translation of movie titles, including market demand and commercial interests. Sometimes, titles may need to be modified appropriately to attract audiences and highlight marketing strategies.

3.3 Translation methods for movie titles

Understanding the origin of the title in the context of the original film is a prerequisite for the correct translation of the title. Specifically, most of the titles of films are based on plots, backgrounds, themes, protagonists, and clues^[7]. Therefore, according to different situations, four methods of translation as follows could help with film titles translation such as literal translation, free translation, transliteration, and modified translation. Each method has its own advantages and limitations. When choosing the translation method, it is necessary to consider factors such as meeting the audiences' needs, accurately conveying the core information of the movie, and conforming to cultural habits.

3.3.1 Literal translation

Literal translation, also known as direct translation, aims to translate every word in the source text word by word into the target language^[7]. This method tends to maintain the original meaning of the title, but may overlook cultural and linguistic considerations. Due to the cultural differences of various countries, the title of an English film often has its own unique internal meaning, which is difficult to express

from the literal translation of the title. If the method of literal translation is used, it will not only be confusing, but also may lose the characteristics of the original title^[7]. For example, the English literal translation of the Chinese movie “活着” is “To Live”. Although the translation accurately reflects the central theme of the movie, it fails to capture the emotional and historical connotations related to the original intention.

3.3.2 Free translation

Free translation, also known as dynamic equivalence, focuses on conveying the essence or overall meaning of the title rather than strictly following the original text^[7]. This method can make the translation process more creative and flexible. For example, the Chinese movie 重庆森林”(Chongqing Senlin) was casually translated into English “Chungking Express”. This translation successfully captures the urban atmosphere and romantic narrative of the movie, providing international audiences with a title that can evoke more memories and appeal. Another example is the English title “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon” of the Chinese movie “卧虎藏龙”, which uses free translation to show the hidden and soaring martial arts masters in the movie, while also having a certain poetic meaning in the English language. The selection of these title translation methods can accurately convey the core information of the movie and meet the cultural and aesthetic needs of the target language audience.

3.3.3 Transliteration

Transliteration involves using speech equivalents in the target language to represent the sound of the source language^[7]. This method is usually used when the source text involves proprietary names (such as person names or place names). A prominent example is the Chinese kung fu film “英雄”(Ying Xiong), which is transliterated as “Hero” in English. This title maintains its original pronunciation and creates a sense of curiosity and admiration associated with heroic characters.

3.3.4 Modified Translation

Modified translation, as the name suggests, involves making slight modifications to the source text to enhance its communicative functions in the target language^[7]. This method considers both cultural and linguistic factors, striking a balance between staying faithful to the original intent and appealing to the target audience. One illustrative example is the Chinese film “无间道”(Wu Jian Dao), which was modified translated into “Infernal Affairs” in English. This title not only captures the underworld ambiance of the movie but also invokes the idea of moral ambiguity and conflicts within.

Based on the Skopos theory, it can be concluded that the use of literal translation, free translation, transliteration, and modified translation by translators can make the translation more in line with the information, aesthetic, and commercial functions of the film, making it easier for the target language audiences to accept and more conducive to the promotion of the films.

4. Analysis of Translation issues of Movies Titles from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

As a globally artistic form, the translation of movies involves cross linguistic and cultural dissemination, and accurate translation of movie titles from Chinese to English is crucial. In the process of translating movie titles from Chinese to English, there are some issues related to language and cultural differences, cultural characteristics and audience acceptance, as well as plot and emotional expression.

4.1 Language and cultural differences

Translation is not only a transfer between languages, but also an exchange between cultures^[8]. The whole process of translation is a process of cultural exchange. The translator “deals with individual words, and he deals with two kinds of different cultures^[8]. The first issue faced in translating movie titles is the difference between Chinese and English languages and cultures. Firstly, there are differences in grammar structure and expression between Chinese and English, which may require some grammar adjustments or reorganization of sentence structure during the process of translation. Secondly, there are differences in the use of vocabulary and idioms between Chinese and English, which may involve some translation difficulties, such as how to accurately convey the meanings of Chinese idioms or English idioms. In addition, the differences between Chinese and Western cultures may also bring some challenges, such as the unique cultural symbols and symbolic meanings in Chinese that may not be properly conveyed in English. Therefore, when translating movie titles, it is necessary to consider the characteristics of the target language and culture to ensure that the target audiences can understand and accept the meaning of the

film title. Although the English title serves as a summary and expression, it cannot fully convey the cultural connotations of the original film. Therefore, in translation, it is necessary to adjust and transform the expression methods appropriately while retaining the original meaning of the title, in order to meet the needs of the target language and culture.

4.2 Cultural characteristics and audiences' acceptance

The close relationship between language and culture is destined for the close relationship between translation and culture^[10]. The translation of movie titles also needs to consider cultural characteristics and audiences' acceptance. Different cultures have different preferences and habits for the naming and expression of movies, and translation requires selecting appropriate translation strategies based on the cultural background and taste of the target audiences. Some movie titles may reflect strong cultural characteristics and emotions, and if translated directly into English, they may lose their original charm and emotional color, making it difficult for audiences to truly appreciate the characteristics and emotions of the movie. In this case, translators can consider using English words or phrases with similar cultural characteristics and emotional colors to better convey the meaning and emotions of the original title. The English title of the movie "Chongqing Forest" is "Chungking Express". Although the literal translation of "Chongqing Forest" in English may be more accurate, considering the audiences' acceptance, the translation of "Chungking", which is more familiar to English speaking countries, can better convey the meaning and emotions expressed in the movie title.

4.3 Plot and emotional expression

As an artistic form with strong plot and emotional expression, movies should summarize the theme and core content of the movie through concise and powerful language, accurately conveying the plot and emotions expressed by the original title. This requires translators to fully understand the original title and movie plot, and choose appropriate words and expressions to ensure that the translation results can accurately convey the plot of the movie. In addition, emotional expression in movies also needs to be accurately conveyed in translation, including character emotions, tone of dialogue, and emotional color. At the same time, translators also need to be careful not to overly personify or exaggerate, in order to avoid misleading the audience's expectations of the movie.

By analyzing the translation of movie titles from the perspective of Skopos theory, it can be found that language and cultural differences, cultural characteristics and audiences' acceptance, as well as plot and emotional expression, have significant impacts on the translation. When translating movie titles from Chinese to English, translators need to consider these factors comprehensively and adopt appropriate translation strategies to ensure that the movie titles translation can accurately convey the meaning and emotions of the original meaning, while adapting to the needs of the target language and culture.

5. Conclusion

The study of translating movie titles from Chinese to English from the perspective of Skopos theory has attracted widespread attention and discussion, emphasizing the importance of understanding audience needs and preserving cultural characteristics in movie title translation. This paper makes a comprehensive analysis of translation principles and strategies in translating movie titles. Research has found that Skopos theory has been widely applied in translating movie titles from Chinese to English^[6]. Translators should choose appropriate translation strategies and methods based on the needs of the target audiences and the cultural backgrounds of various movies. Meanwhile, the acceptance and feedback of the target audiences towards translation have significant impacts on translation quality and effectiveness.

Although scholars have previously provided some insights for the improvement of film translation quality and the success of cultural transmission by studying and analyzing the translation of specific movie titles, there are still some limitations in current research, such as limited sample size and limitations in research methods. Therefore, future research can further expand the sample size, use multiple methods for verification, explore more empirical studies to verify the applicability of Skopos theory in movie title translation, and thus gain a more comprehensive understanding of the practical and theoretical issues of translating movie titles from Chinese to English. Additionally, with the advancement of technology, it is also possible to study the application of automated translation tools in the framework of Skopos theory to improve the efficiency and quality of movie title translation.

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